

## ***West Virginia Agriculture Water Quality Loan Program***

In February 1997 the WV Soil Conservation Agency announced the West Virginia Agriculture Water Quality Loan Program (AgWQLP). This endeavor was made possible by a unique partnership and cooperation of the WV Division of Environmental Protection, the state's 14 Soil Conservation Districts and the USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Since the inception of the loan program in 1997, the loan program has helped make it possible for agriculture producers to utilize valuable programs funded by the USDA - NRCS and matching funds provided by the WVSCA, with the programs being the Potomac Headwaters Land Treatment Project (PL-534) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

In 2000, the WVSCA initiated and administered Section 319 Incremental Projects. AgWQLP loan dollars were made available to agriculture producers in North Fork of the South Branch in Pendleton County and Spring Creek in Wirt and Roane Counties.

In 2001, with the cooperation of the WV Division of Environmental Protection and Region III Environmental Protection Agency, the WV AgWQLP was attainable to approved cooperators to implement Forestry Best Management Practices (BMPs). The eligible cooperators must first be approved for 319 Incremental Projects for forestry incentives.

The above-mentioned programs provide 60 percent to 75 percent of installation cost to implement BMPs. The loan program provides the 40 percent to 25 percent out-of-pocket expense at a 2 percent interest rate.

In fiscal year 2001, 32 loans were secured from cooperators for a total of \$518,683. Overall, 203 loans have been funded for a total of \$3,015,646 for the entire program since its inception in 1997.

## ***Public Outreach & Support***

The WV Conservation Partnership continues to strengthen the bond between its members and the landowners of the Mountain State. The Soil Conservation Districts play an important role in doing this. All of the districts are involved with their communities in a number of ways. They continue to sponsor grassland and conservation field days for local landowners to learn new and innovative ways to make their soil and water more productive. The districts also sponsor scholarships for area high school students and help teams involved with the West Virginia Envirothon, a hands-on conservation competition that encourages teamwork in an effort to help solve problems our ecology faces.

Districts also offer specialized equipment rental for local landowners. They rent many types of equipment, including aerators, litter/lime spreaders and brush control sprayers. All of these pieces of equipment can play a significant role in soil and water conservation.

The WV Soil Conservation Agency is proud of its relationship with the Conservation Partnership and with the landowners of this state. Working together, the agency believes that the future will indeed be a bright one for this generation and future generations to come.